



May 4, 2011

To Those Interested in Columbia City Cinema:

The Department of Planning and Development (DPD) and Fire Department have been working with the Columbia City Cinema for almost a year to try and resolve safety issues, in an effort to retain this important community facility and to ensure the safety of the public. We are disappointed that the operator has chosen to shut down the Cinema rather than address these safety concerns.

The Columbia City Cinema has been in operation for several years, but unfortunately it has done so illegally. A permit for a movie theater was never obtained for this building, and installation of required safety improvements was never completed. The most critical concerns are providing safe exits for patrons and providing sprinklers. City staff confirmed with the owner that there were issues with both exiting and sprinklers when this issue was first brought to our attention. Over the last 12 months, the City has reached out and convened several meetings with the owner to help work on these issues while temporarily allowing the business to remain open at a reduced capacity.

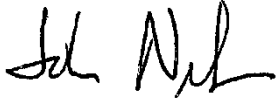
There are several features of this building that make these upgrades particularly important. The cinema is housed within an old building which was originally used as a Masonic Lodge. This is a rare cinema in that it contains a large theater on an upper level of a building constructed of wood. Most older theaters are one floor only, and were built as theaters many years ago. When a new business such as a cinema occupies a structure like this, it requires a permit to install additional safety upgrades so that the customers and families are able to safely exit the building during a fire. Sprinklers or increased fire-resistive construction have been required for a building of this type (containing an upper-level movie theater) since the 1940's. Had the owner consulted with the City before occupying this space, we would have identified these issues in advance so that these safety upgrades would have been considered by the business owner.

The City has been committed to working with the owner of Columbia City Cinema on complying with the current code. The Fire Department, in consultation with DPD, agreed to grant temporary assembly permits for the cinema while progress was made towards obtaining a permit and completing the safety upgrades. However, it's been 12 months since this issue was identified. The construction permit has not been obtained and it has become increasingly clear that the owner does not have a feasible plan to make the required safety upgrades to this building.

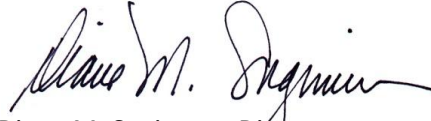
We had also informed the owner that he had a different option – sprinklers would not be required if capacity were reduced and only the lower screen was used. That remains an option for the owner.

The City recognizes the importance of this local institution, but we would be doing a disservice to the community if we allow the cinema to continue to operate in its current configuration without considering the safety of the public. Many business owners across the City have complied with these requirements, and it would not be fair to them to exempt other businesses from the same rules. We remain supportive of the Cinema and appreciate its value to the community, and urge the owner to address the public safety issues we have identified.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Nelsen".

Assistant Chief John Nelsen
Fire Marshal

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Diane M. Sugimura".

Diane M. Sugimura, Director
Department of Planning and Development